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Curfew is the Camp

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"Auschwitz is outside of us, but it is all around us, in the air. The plague has died away, but the infection still lingers, and it would be foolish to deny it."
Primo Levi

"Under the curfew, the day lasts longer than a week!"
A friend in Srinagar, Indian-occupied Kashmir

In her profoundly influential book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt writes, "There are no parallels to the life in the concentration camps. Its horror can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside of life and death." The birth of the nation-state was accompanied by the creation of colonies and concentration camps. One does not exist without the other. The modern camp in its various reiterations is conceived as a space to strip human beings of their political existence, contain their rebellious capacities, and deny them their rights. Taken to its

logical ends, it robs people of their humanity before it robs them of their life. Accompanying this is the terror, the fear of losing everything, the horror of violence that might occur any moment, and the struggle to merely survive.

Society of the Unfree: The case of Kashmir

Since the Second World War, the world has witnessed a proliferation of these encampments and a normalisation of these spaces. They are no longer considered spaces of exception but are constitutive of broader geopolitical regimes of control. Sometimes the camp takes the shape of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, Refugee Detention Centre in Lampedusa or the US prison industrial complex. Elsewhere, the camp flees its walls to construct a society of the unfree. The Israeli apartheid regimes in Palestine, the Assad government's siege of the city of Darya, or the most recent curfew in Kashmir, now past the hundred days imposed by the Indian State to quell popular protests, are all examples of a camp that has breached its walls.

The killing of Burhan Wani by the State security forces on July 8th ignited a wave of anti-Indian protests throughout Kashmir Valley. Following the valley-wide protests, a curfew was imposed on July 15, 2016. Mobile and telephone services remain suspended by the government. Kashmir Reader, an English daily published from Srinagar, has been banned. Kashmiri human rights activist, Khurram Pervez, was arrested the day after he was stopped in Delhi by authorities while boarding a flight to Geneva to attend the ongoing United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) session.

Along with the suspension of all civil liberties, Kashmiris have experienced unmitigated violence. During the 100 days of curfew, Jammu and Kashmir police and the Indian forces have used rubber bullets, pellet guns, and assault rifles, resulting in the deaths of more than 90 civilians, with over 8,000 civilians injured. The Indian Army is reported to have burned crops and fired tear gas shells at villagers and protesters. Just recently, twelve-year-old Junaid Ahmed from Sri Nagar was killed by pellets that the Indian state deems "non-lethal." Later, teargas shells were fired at his funeral. This public face of terror is the unending curfew, now having lasted over a hundred days.

The curfew is an incarceration that defines Kashmiris outside the boundaries of civility and humanity; a new form of servitude and slavery wrapped in the name of democracy. It is also a brutal repetition of history, haunting in its simplicity and terror. While the most recent curfew is the longest imposed in the valley, it is just one of many that the valley has experienced since 1984. A.G.Noorani, writing about Kashmir in August 1985, lays out the following constitutional argument in his essay, "Curfew as Tool of Repression": "To ban meetings and processions is to muzzle organised protest. To impose a curfew is to stifle and repress spontaneous, unorganised protest by the people at large. One hopes that the Kashmir experience will serve to invite public attention to the perils of abuse of section 144." Sec 144 prohibits assembly of more than five persons without prior police permission. It's violation is "punished with imprisonment." Thirty years later, Sec 144 remains an important tool of repression, employed both as a technique of collective punishment and criminalisation of dissent.

The perversion of law remains an essential feature of the camp. Here, the laws do not function as the protector of personal liberty but are created to secure reliable political decisions for the state. There are no fixed limits of judicial or legal impropriety, and laws are arbitrarily applied, revoked, and discarded. To live and be governed by these ever-changing rules is to live under an all-seeing, all-powerful, whimsical state with arbitrarily chosen ideologies like an obedient chameleon.

The methods of control employed by the Indian State in Kashmir are infinite and ever-proliferating, accompanied by unlimited violence under the aegis of total war. The terror is fluid, all-encompassing, and perpetual. It functions as a constant background score to everyday existence. The strategies of the camp are also the strategies of occupation. John Keane writes in his book *Democracy and Violence* that "The terror must be neither directly graspable nor manageable: it should function as noise whizzing through the heads of its potential victims. The name of the game is militant defeatism. The minds and bodies of the enemy should be shaken to their core. They should (to use prison language) be buried alive, tortured in their isolation, compelled to doubt themselves into oblivion. Meaning itself should be destroyed."

Occupation produces the camp

Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas narrates his conversation with Stalin in 1943-44: "This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army has the power to do so. It cannot be otherwise." What Stalin describes here are the beginnings of the creation of a carceral society through occupation. It was no longer just holding territory; it was something far sinister - the absolute control over the minds of the people it occupies. Occupation is keeping a population under a constant state of aberration; it remakes everyday life at the level of desire, love, fear, security, trust, and loyalty — all of which affect human

dignity, political agency and individual anatomy. The modern counter-insurgency language of "winning heart and minds" is a linguistically benign manifestation of the same strategies of control and obedience.

The curfew in Kashmir, like the camp, is designed to hold people in captivity. The recurring themes - the cataloguing of people, indexing of their ideologies, along with penal servitude and the strategic use of violence - are aimed at creating a loyal subject cleansed of resistance. Creating the camp, a prison-like society with border fortifications as well as militarization is linked to the larger project of rule by occupation. Similarly, penal and policing policies in the valley are inexplicably tied to the war making project and connected to the nation-building project that reproduces conditions for an incarcerated society. Now in its 100th day, the curfew is a mass incarceration of the entire community.

Border is the Prison

In their conversation about globalisation, gender and incarceration,[1] Angela Davis and Gina Dent make an argument for the prison as the border. Using the prison "as a contingent historical institution" they theorise the nature of the US penitentiary system through the "intersections gender, and race, within and beyond the borders." Mass incarceration in the US has its historical origins and continuity in racialized slavery. The concentration camp is a part of this history of slavery, colonisation, and the genocides of various indigenous populations.

The camp in Kashmir has to be understood in inverse. The thread that connects slavery and current mass incarceration also enables new occupations by democracies. The institutions, ideologies and practices of colonisation that produced slavery, also created The camp. In her essay "Occupier/occupied" Kamala Visweswaran writes, "Occupation thus renews the language of colonial racism, it's spatial and juridical structures replicating those of necropolitical apartheid regimes." The militarised borders, the penal system of governance and architectures of surveillance like the check posts and concertina fences all produce the reality where - the border in itself is the prison. Kashmir is not just an occupied land; it is also a living breathing open air prison.

The camp, the colony, and the occupied territory are not entities of isolation. The act of occupying affects the occupier. The use of violence that is imperative for occupation does not function without it being "adequately internalised." The violence that clears the occupied grounds of resistance is also the violence that the soldiers bring back home. Occupation militarizes the land of the occupied and the mind of the occupier. To occupy a society of unfree, one must begin by creating a society steeped in the culture of hate. A nation state cannot simultaneously be an occupying force and remain a functioning secular democracy. The structural determinants of occupation go against the maintenance of a robust democracy. In an occupier's society, the community itself first needs to be "brought into line", and ideologically synchronised to defend the occupation. Ideas become absolute, and pluralism is purged. Above all, it justifies the permanent loss of freedom and the unspeakable terror that awaits a community that resists, both in India and Kashmir.

Kashmir remains India's greatest moral and political failure. We can no longer make excuses for our repression, brutality and violence. Questions of Kashmir can no longer be answered through war, or dialogues between two dictators. It has to begin with the voices in Kashmir that demand nothing short of freedom. The truth must be sought in all its ugliness if we are to liberate our militarised minds and imaginations.

1. Angela Davis and Gina Dent. "Prison as a Border: A Conversation on Gender, Globalization, and Punishment." *Signs,* Vol. 26, No. 4, Globalization and Gender (Summer, 2001), pp. 1235-1241.

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